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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this document is twofold: (1) to inform legislators, counselors, and other education professionals about elementary school counseling and the policies that have been formed in support of this profession; and (2) to open lines of communication between counseling professionals and state-level decision makers. Chapter one examines some of the barriers to learning that today's youth face and the role that elementary school counselors can play in helping children overcome these barriers and achieve their true potential. Chapter two describes the principles of comprehensive school counseling programs, the tasks elementary school counselors perform, and the benefits of counseling to children and society. Chapter three presents the findings of research studies in the area of elementary school counseling and its relationship to academic achievement; dropout rates; and children's behaviors, attitudes, and skills. Chapter four explores the roles of state legislators in developing policies for elementary school counseling and provides examples of state policies and funding strategies. Chapter five lists recommendations for the development of effective elementary school counseling policy in such areas as legislative study and professional activity, adequately evaluated pilot projects, guidance committees as community liaisons, and optimum working conditions for effective counselors. The 50 states' policies are charted in an appendix. (60 references) (ABL)

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Children Achieving Potential

An Introduction to Elementary School Counseling and State-Level Policies

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The American Association for Counseling and Development is a private, non-profit organization with more than 56,000 members in the United States and 50 foreign countries. AACD members are counseling and human development professionals committed to helping people of all ages, cultures, and physical capabilities reach their maximum potential in their personal lives, their education and their careers. The Association's headquarter offices are in Alexandria, Virginia.

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Children Achieving Potential

An Introduction to Elementary School Counseling and State-Level Policies

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Introduction

Children are the future of our families, our communities, our nation. We will one day depend upon them personally, politically, and economically. It is, therefore, in the best interest of *all* people to see that our youngsters develop the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary to become healthy, productive adults. It is in our best interest to make the United States a nation of children achieving their potential.

As we struggle to compete in an international marketplace, education has become a center of policy discussions at the state and national levels. And as we strive toward *educational excellence*, experts differ on what this phrase actually means, how to measure it, and how best to achieve it. The American Association for Counseling and Development's Task Force on A Nation at Risk cautions that narrowing our definition of excellence to test performance may actually disenfranchise more students and contribute to even higher numbers of adolescents dropping out of school. They stress that personal and social competency must necessarily precede, as well as accompany, academic competency. Other reports have suggested some alternatives for achieving excellence such as lengthening the school day, offering a more flexible curriculum, offering a more rigid curriculum, and decreasing the number of children in each classroom. While each of these strategies has its merits, common sense tells us that we must provide children with the support they need personally and socially as well as academically.

The problems facing today's youth are complex and must be tackled from many directions if they are to be resolved. Policymakers at all levels are creating ways to approach the whole child such as fostering collaboration between child-serving agencies, often with the school as a focal point. Schools are being restructured to provide students with the attention and direction they need to keep up with the academic and personal demands put upon them by a society marked by constant change.

The many reports stemming from the past decade of education reform have addressed these issues at length. Topics such as at-risk youth, parental involvement in education, and interagency collaboration have emerged as top priorities on educational agendas. One common ingredient in all of these is the concept of early intervention--the need to try to *prevent* problems before they become crises; to teach young children coping strategies before they become high school dropouts or statistics on teenage pregnancy.

Elementary school counselors are trained to use early intervention strategies to help children achieve their potential by working with the whole child. They act as a bridge between teachers and parents, schools and social service agencies, families and children. Although specifically trained to perform these functions in an educational setting, school counselors have not been adequately included in the discussions of restructuring schools or in helping formulate state policy concerning comprehensive guidance and counseling in elementary schools. One reason for this oversight is a lack of information on the part of all parties involved.

The purpose of this document is twofold: to inform legislators, counselors, and other education professionals about elementary school counseling and the policies that have been formed in support of this profession; and to open the lines of communication between counseling professionals and state-level decision makers.

This publication is divided into five chapters. *Chapter one* examines some of the barriers to learning that today's youth face and the role that elementary school counselors can play in helping children overcome these barriers and achieve their true potential. *Chapter two*

describes the principles of comprehensive school counseling programs, the tasks elementary school counselors perform, and the benefits of counseling to children and society. *Chapter three* presents the findings of research studies in the area of elementary school counseling and its relationship to academic achievement; dropout rates; and children's behaviors, attitudes, and skills. *Chapter four* explores the roles of state legislators in developing policies for elementary school counseling and provides examples of state policies and funding strategies. *Chapter five* lists recommendations for the development of effective elementary school counseling policy.

I

The Challenge: Children Achieving Potential

All adults involved in education policy today find themselves faced with this challenge: how to provide *every* child with a quality education appropriate for helping the child reach his/her greatest potential. Why must we consider strategies such as preventive elementary school counseling programs to help reach this goal? What obstacles exist for young children that make it difficult for them to function in our current educational system?

Why Do Elementary School Children Need Counseling?

Academic success is not an isolated component of a child's life. It is affected not only by the child's level of intelligence, but also by a number of other factors that combine to make up the whole child. A child's life can be divided into four segments: family, society/peers, school, and self-concept. To say that any of these segments exists independently of the others would be naive. What we need to know is how all of them affect a child's academic performance.

What could be happening within each of these areas to create barriers to learning?

Every day, 2,989 American children see their parents divorced.

Every 26 seconds, a child runs away from home.

Every 47 seconds, a child is abused or neglected.

Every seven minutes, a child is killed or injured by guns.

Every 53 minutes, a child dies because of poverty.

Every day, 100,000 children are homeless.

Every school day, 135,000 children bring guns to school.

Every eight seconds of the school day, a child drops out.

Every day, six teenagers commit suicide.

Source: Children's Defense Fund, 1990.

(1) **Family:** Divorce, parental substance abuse, working parents, illiterate parents, incest, lack of attention, lack of positive reinforcement.

(2) **Society/Peers:** Violence in media, gangs, drugs, poverty, threat of nuclear war, premarital sex, peer reinforcement of family-caused insecurities.

(3) **School:** High pupil/teacher ratios, pressure to excel at an early age, violence at school, lack of individual attention, lack of nonjudgmental child/adult relationship.

(4) **Self-Concept:** All the aspects of a child's life combine to create a self-concept. But to overcome a low self-concept developed before beginning school, a child needs an abundance of positive influences. By having a strong self-concept and by making positive decisions, a child can tackle the problems mentioned above and make progress.

None of these areas is meant to be comprehensive. Yet, one or several of the influences mentioned do exist for many children of elementary school age, and they can set the stage for future problems if they are not dealt with as early as possible in a child's life.

Children with a lot of these problems will be labeled at risk and provided special services. But many will exhibit symptoms masked as shyness, arrogance, eccentricity, or oversensitivity. Those who don't cause trouble, who pass tests but don't excel, may be at risk of not reaching their potential and may be suffering inside. Yet, these children slip through the cracks when crisis intervention is the main focus.

Many recent reports have addressed at-risk youth and the best methods for helping these youngsters. They are defined as youth who are in danger of leaving school without the skills needed to continue their education or become productive, self-sufficient members of society (MDC, Inc., 1988, p. 2). These reports repeatedly call for early intervention to head off the problems that appear so uncontrollable when a child turns 15 or 16 and is failing or dropping out of high school.

The argument for elementary school counseling is one of early intervention and prevention but in a more comprehensive manner than what is asked for in the at-risk youth reports. All children are at risk, not necessarily of failing, but of not reaching their true potential. As much as we need to see that those who are being unproductive become productive, *we also need to see that those with potential to excel will excel because our future depends on having not only a workforce of literate adults but also a society of creative thinkers, artists, entrepreneurs, and strong leaders.* The qualities required for success can be strengthened or weakened in the early years. We see what is being done to weaken them and are suggesting a way to help make our children strong.

Elementary School Counselors and Children Achieving Potential

One common factor many reports on educational reforms share is the recognition that early identification and intervention of children's problems are essential to change some of the current statistics regarding dropouts, teenage pregnancy, suicide, substance abuse, and other self-destructive behaviors. If we wait until children are in middle or high school to address the reasons behind the statistics, we lose the opportunity to help them achieve their potential. In fact, by the time they reach high school, we have already lost too many of our young people to suicide and substance abuse!

Comprehensive school counseling is based on preventing children's problems from occurring through a systematic program of counseling and guidance services. Not all problems can be prevented. However, their early identification and early intervention before they escalate and interfere with learning and healthy development remain critical goals of counseling programs in elementary schools.

To become a school counselor, a person must have a master's degree and meet other certification requirements as defined by each state. Through their graduate programs, elementary school counselors are trained to work toward preventing the development of children's problems, intervene quickly to correct problems and prevent their escalation, and provide crisis intervention. Qualified counselors must be versed in human development, career development, social systems, mental health, group dynamics and counseling, family therapy, physical and emotional rehabilitation, individual assessment, organizational behavior, human relationships, psychology, and placement and referral. They are truly human development specialists and should play a central role in the education of our youth.

Counselors can make major contributions toward resolving many of the problems previously mentioned in this report.

Young people are challenged by difficult choices that will affect their lives. They must make decisions or cope with situations regarding substance abuse; premarital sex; teenage pregnancy; academic performance; physical, sexual, and emotional abuse; dropping out of school; and suicide. If we have any hope of *preventing* children's problems from occurring or becoming serious enough to interfere with their learning, programs *must* begin during the most critical time in their lives--elementary school.

The call for comprehensive school counseling programs has been heard from many concerned groups:

- The national PTA passed a resolution in 1983 encouraging all state and local PTAs to seek funding for school counseling programs.
- In "Keeping the Options Open: Recommendations," the College Entrance Examination Board in 1986 strongly urged that comprehensive school counseling programs be provided from kindergarten through grade 12.
- In 1986, the National School Boards Association passed a resolution supporting comprehensive school counseling programs.
- To date, all states report having some counselors in their elementary schools; 12 states have mandated elementary school counseling; and 12 more are considering mandates.
- The College Board (Hartman, 1989, p. 18) suggested that "improved guidance and counseling in our schools can contribute significantly to reducing the considerable waste of human talent that now exists."

II

The Role of Counselors in Elementary Schools

Principles of Comprehensive School Counseling Programs

Childhood is not simply a time of innocence but a time when children must confront and master a myriad of tasks such as mastering fundamental academic skills in reading, writing, and calculating; building a positive self-concept and an awareness of abilities, aptitudes, interests, and limitations; learning to get along with peers; becoming aware and tolerant of individual differences; developing an awareness of the world of work; and acquiring new physical skills. These are all part of children's job description for their work during elementary school years. *It is the overriding goal of elementary school counselors to provide a planned program of guidance and counseling services based on these developmental needs and to help all children achieve their greatest academic, social, and personal potential.*

A summary of some of the basic principles of developmental counseling states that a developmental school counseling program

> is for all students, has an organized and planned curriculum, is sequential and flexible, is an integrated part of the total educational process, involves all school personnel, helps students learn more effectively and efficiently, includes counselors who provide specialized counseling services and interventions (Myrick, 1987).

School counseling program is an umbrella term encompassing a wide variety of services administrators, teachers, counselors, and other pupil personnel specialists offer in kindergarten through senior high school settings. School counseling programs share similar characteristics with other educational programs such as "student outcomes (student competencies); activities and processes to assist students in achieving these outcomes; professionally recognized personnel; and materials and resources" (Gysbers and Henderson, 1988).

School counseling programs are *comprehensive* in the range of activities and services provided. These include:

- Preventive classroom guidance activities;
- Individual and group counseling;
- Referrals to community agencies;
- Consultation with teachers, administrators, parents, and community leaders;
- Crisis intervention; and
- Assessment, placement, and follow-up services.

A *team approach* is essential to comprehensive school counseling programs. There is an underlying assumption that all school staff must be actively involved in promoting student achievement. Throughout this report, the *team* refers to teachers, parents, and the school counselor, administrator, psychologist, and social worker. At the core of this team are

qualified elementary school counselors, who counsel students and parents and work as consultants to (and collaborators with) all team members.

Guidance describes an instructional process or structured learning activities, which attempt to prevent problems. Such activities assist children in developing greater understanding of themselves and others and emphasize the needs of a group of students rather than those of any one child.

Counseling is a process in which a trained professional forms a trusting relationship with a person who needs assistance. This relationship focuses on personal meaning of experiences, feelings, behaviors, alternatives, consequences, and goals. Counseling provides a unique opportunity for individuals to explore and express their ideas and feelings in a nonevaluative, nonthreatening environment.

What Do Elementary School Counselors Do?

For many people, the word *counselor* brings to mind the image of someone they saw once or twice during their high school years. The stereotypic school guidance counselor of 20 years ago was the person who gave tests, passed out information, helped high school students with their class schedules, filled out college applications, and often acted as a disciplinarian. With this image in mind, many people question the need for counselors in elementary schools. But this is not an accurate picture of who elementary school counselors are and what they do. For many children, the school counselor may be the one person with whom they feel safe and can confide in. Unlike teachers, counselors do not grade students, can often meet with them individually, and do not change classes from year to year.

The following are some of the basic tasks routinely performed by elementary school counselors.

Classroom Guidance

A comprehensive school counseling program involves planned guidance activities for all students. These age-related exercises foster students' academic, personal, social, and career development skills. Such activities are implemented through a collaborative effort by counselors and teachers. The classroom guidance curriculum focuses on topics such as:

- Self-understanding;
- Effective interpersonal and communication skills;
- Problem-solving, decision-making, and conflict resolution skills;
- Effective study skills and positive attitudes toward school;
- Career awareness and the world of work;
- Substance abuse prevention;

- Comprehension and acceptance of differences in people (racial, gender-based, cultural, religious, physical); and

- Divorce.

School counselors take the lead in the development and organization of the guidance curriculum. The implementation of guidance activities, however, requires the support and assistance of teachers, parents, and administrators. Counselors can train teachers to conduct many activities during their classes. Other guidance procedures may be delivered most effectively by other team members. Regardless of who conducts the exercises, the whole team must be aware of their goals so that they can be reinforced. For example, after a work-related guidance activity, parents can discuss the personal satisfaction they experience from their work and leisure time. Or after a class field trip to a local factory, small groups of students can analyze different parts of the production process.

Individual and Small Group Counseling

In many situations, counselors work with students when they experience problems. However, counseling must be more than the provision of remediation and crisis intervention--if counselors are always putting out fires, they have little time to prevent them from starting. Developmental counseling provides students with coping strategies before a crisis occurs. This may involve seeing students individually or in groups to help them develop and use their resources. Counseling can also be provided for parents to address specific problems that may interfere with their children's success in school.

Group counseling has become an invaluable part of most elementary school counselors' work. Working with students in groups acknowledges that peer influence is an extremely powerful factor in children's development. Groups provide them with an opportunity to give and receive feedback, which contributes to their understanding of themselves and others. It also allows them to practice interpersonal and personal skills in a safe, reinforcing environment. In addition, a group approach enables counselors to have an impact on a greater number of children, making the most efficient use of the professionals' time.

Of course, a group approach is not best suited for every child. There are children who benefit most from individual counseling, or a combination of individual and group work. For some children, the nature of their problem requires more confidentiality. Others may have extreme difficulty in relating to their peers, be overwhelmed in group situations, be personally dysfunctional, or need individual attention.

Students are referred for counseling by:

- *Teachers*
- *Parents*
- *School psychologists*
- *Themselves*

Students often need help in many different areas of their lives. The following four areas are based on recommendations in *The Professional Development Guidelines for Elementary School Counselors: A Self Audit* (American School Counselor Association, 1990).

(1) *Coping with family issues:* Includes divorce/single-parent homes; death, loss, and grief; loss of parent's job; substance abuse; physical, sexual, emotional abuse;

poverty; homelessness; change of residence/school; incarceration; and both parents working.

(2) *Dealing effectively with interpersonal issues:* Includes communication skills, coping with peer pressure, accepting responsibility for actions, respecting the rights of others, understanding and accepting individual differences, and getting along with others.

(3) *Becoming effective and responsible learners:* Includes attitudes about school, academic competition, academic failure, school phobia, individual learning styles, responsible school behavior, and conflicts with teachers.

(4) *Coping with personal adjustment issues:* Includes stress management, depression, suicide, eating disorders, addictions, and health problems.

Consultation

Consultation in school counseling programs focuses on the total learning environment of the school (Myrick, 1987). Teachers use counselors as a resource, seeking consultation on specific students' problems and on general issues such as addressing the needs of culturally diverse students in the classroom. Many teachers can benefit from a counselor's assistance in developing new ways of responding and relating to children.

Elementary school teachers in Arkansas presented testimony to the legislature's Education Standards Committee stating their most pressing need was dealing with children's problems and requested that counselors be assigned to their schools.

A major part of the counselor's role is to collaborate with teachers and parents, not to criticize them. In fact, counselors can provide support and encouragement to teachers and parents who may be feeling frustrated, discouraged, overwhelmed, or unappreciated.

Counselors work with teachers and administrators to help create the kind of school environments that stimulate growth and learning. Their emphasis is on making the educational process more personal and increasing teachers' and administrators' understanding of the importance of fostering acceptance of and valuing individual differences in learning styles and rates of learning; how adults' expectations, biases, and behaviors affect students; and ways of helping children cope with success and failure.

Michelle, a second grade teacher, attended a workshop on cooperative learning. She was excited about trying some of the techniques she learned but was unsure of how to arrange the students into groups. She contacted the school counselor. Together, they clarified her goals and plans, facilitating classroom implementation of her ideas.

Troy was a shy 11-year-old boy. The teacher told his parents that, although his grades were low, he had the potential to do better. Troy often complained of stomach aches and missed school because of illness. This compounded his academic problems. His parents met with the school counselor to discuss what they might do to break this negative cycle.

Typically, consultation involves:

- Conducting professional development workshops and discussions with teachers and other school personnel on subjects such as substance or child abuse;

- Assisting teachers to work with individual students or groups of students;
- Providing relevant materials and resources to teachers, especially relating to classroom guidance curriculum;
- Assisting in the identification and development of programs for students with special needs;
- Participating in school committees that address substance abuse, human growth and development, school climate, and other guidance-related areas;
- Designing and conducting parent education classes;
- Interpreting student information, such as results of standardized tests for students and team members;
- Consulting regularly with other specialists (e.g., social workers, psychologists, representatives from community agencies).

Coordination

Before guidance and counseling activities can take place, much planning, thinking, and coordinating are required. Research in the area has shown that systematic coordination of guidance programs is essential for effective delivery of services (Kameen, Robinson, and Rotter, 1985).

Ten-year-old Carmen was extremely depressed and had been seeing a therapist at the community mental health center. The therapist was concerned that Carmen was not responding well to treatment. With permission from Carmen and her parents, the therapist called the school counselor.

The counselor consulted with Carmen's teacher and observed her behavior in school. The therapist and counselor then discussed possible interventions that could take place at school, including how the counselor's work could supplement that of the therapist. Carmen's teacher became more alert to Carmen's needs and worked with the counselor on establishing a more positive relationship with her.

The Virginia School Counselors Association notes that elementary school counselors must perform the following five coordination functions:

(1) Coordinate the use of school and community resources in collaboration with other team members;

(2) Assist parents in gaining access to services their children need--e.g., a child psychologist or a local housing agency--through a referral and follow-up process;

(3) Serve as liaison between the school, home, and community agencies so that efforts to help students are successful and reinforced rather than duplicated;

(4) Plan, coordinate, and evaluate the guidance program's effectiveness; and

(5) Coordinate the school's testing program, which usually includes interpreting test results to parents, students, and school personnel.

Stephen's teacher suspected that he was being neglected at home. Stephen had often been seen on school grounds after hours and had been accused of stealing other children's lunches. The teacher referred him to the school counselor who, because neglect was suspected, was obligated by law to refer the case to the local Department of Social Services.

The community social worker and the school counselor coordinated the services needed by Stephen and his family, including financial assistance for housing and enrollment for him in the school's extended day care program. The counselor also spoke with his mother every few weeks, keeping her up-to-date on Stephen's progress in school.

In addition, counselors coordinate a variety of guidance-related activities including those related to special events throughout the year such as National Career Guidance Week and Human Rights Week. They also maintain an active role in the development and implementation of extracurricular programs designed to promote students' personal growth and skill development (e.g., student council, safety patrol, peer helpers' programs).

Working with Parents

One common recommendation noted in the major proposals for education reform is the need to involve parents more in their children's education. A considerable amount of elementary school counselors' time can be spent doing just this. It is also important to recognize that parents are not always the main adult responsible for a child's development. A large number of children look to grandparents, older siblings, or other relatives for guidance. Although the term *parent* is used throughout this report, it includes all adults who play a significant role in children's home and school lives.

Many school counselors offer parenting classes that focus on providing adults with valuable techniques for helping their children meet their academic, personal, and social potential. Counselors also conduct workshops on specific issues such as normal growth and development, development of study habits, counteracting negative peer pressure, preventing substance abuse, helping children cope with divorce, and managing disruptive behaviors. Many counselors put out newsletters letting parents know what is happening in the school, offering ideas for keeping children active in constructive ways over holiday breaks, and giving tips to improve study habits.

As mentioned earlier, counselors are also receptive to the specific needs of parents whose children may be experiencing problems (or parents whose problems may be affecting their children adversely). Counselors hold individual, family, and group counseling sessions on a short-term basis and also coordinate referrals to other specialists in the school system and community agencies.

Through these activities, elementary school counselors become liaisons between the school and home (ERIC/CAPS, 1985) and are often seen as both the child's and the family's advocate by many parents.

Peer Facilitation

Students often share their problems with peers rather than adults. Counselors provide structured opportunities for children to serve as peer helpers. The power of peer influence cannot be minimized and, in fact, should be capitalized upon. Peer helpers can be selected by school staff and trained by professional counselors in communication and basic counseling

skills through a carefully planned program. Counselors are responsible for budgeting adequate time for meeting with the peer helpers on a weekly basis for continued training, supervision, support, and personal growth. Counselors also continually monitor and evaluate the training and impact of the peer facilitation program.

Peer facilitators talk with other students about their personal problems and refer them to counselors or other adults for help. They are also trained to work well in group settings, teaching basic communication skills to other students and helping facilitate guidance discussions. In addition, peer facilitators tutor students in academic areas, serve as readers for nonreaders, and assist in special education classes. They are also effective in greeting new students and their parents during orientation programs. Overall, recent research shows that both peer facilitators and the students they are matched with benefit from the relationship.

Making Appropriate Referrals

Counselors establish and maintain close working relationships with staff of a variety of school and community agencies. These agencies include departments of health and social services, mental health centers, juvenile courts, and advocacy groups. To help students and their families cope with an array of problems, counselors identify school and community resources and establish policies and procedures for interagency communication.

A teacher noticed that Laverne was occasionally weepy in class and had become withdrawn. When asked what was wrong, Laverne said, "Nothing." The teacher referred her to the school counselor who, after some individual counseling services and discussions with her parents, discovered that Laverne's father had been unemployed for about four months. The family was now being threatened with eviction from their home.

The school counselor gave Laverne's parents the names and telephone numbers of people who could help them obtain emergency housing funds and referred her father to employment counseling services. Laverne attended several sessions with the counselor and then joined a school counseling group.

Some typical tasks counselors may be involved with while helping students and their families gain access to the services they need include:

- Identifying and assisting students and their parents with special needs by referring them to resources in and outside the school;
- Maintaining contacts with outside resources;
- Developing, publishing, and distributing a list of community resources, referral agencies, and hotlines for parents, students, and colleagues;
- Developing a student self-referral system;
- Following up on referrals.

Assessment

Counselors help students identify their skills, abilities, achievements, and interests through counseling activities and the guidance curriculum. They also interpret standardized test results for parents, faculty, and students; relate the results to strengths and limitations in

the school's curriculum; and assist in planning and implementing changes in the curriculum and school's procedures.

Counselors use a variety of assessment instruments to identify the social/emotional needs of students and make recommendations to teachers based on these assessments.

Specialized Populations and Needs

Working with students from culturally diverse populations and students with disabilities requires special attention. Counselors' activities can promote:

- Students' and school personnel's acceptance of differences;
- Policies, procedures, and behaviors that reflect freedom from stereotypes;
- Examination of schools' testing programs to ensure that they reflect equitable standards for all students; and
- Outreach to parents and families of students from culturally diverse populations.

Career Awareness in Elementary School Counseling Programs

Many people think of career education as focusing on career and occupational choices and believe that it takes place in middle and high schools. While it is true that some career decisions are made in high school, the seeds of these decisions begin long before someone turns 18. Career development is actually a lifelong process integrating the roles, settings, and events of a person's life (Gysbers and Moore, 1981). In this sense, the word *career* encompasses all the roles in which individuals are involved (student, worker, family member, citizen). As such, career education is an integral part of students' school experiences as they grow and develop.

In general, the guidance curriculum focuses on facilitating interpersonal relationships and decision-making and problem-solving skills--all of which can increase a student's future effectiveness in the workplace.

Guidance and general classroom activities can focus specifically on the world of work. An untold number of opportunities exist for children to relate school subject matter to career themes. Teachers can link mathematics lessons to the working world by having a model supermarket in the classroom. Part of the science curriculum can focus on the professional functions of people in science-related fields. During a current events lesson discussing, perhaps, the building of a new airport, students can learn about the interdependence of jobs that are needed to accomplish the goal.

At the elementary school level, students are in the process of forming basic values, attitudes, and interests regarding their future world of work. An effective school team helps children develop positive attitudes toward work, take pride in their own efforts, become aware of the many different career opportunities, and understand and acquire good work habits.

III

Research in Support of Elementary School Counseling

As discussed throughout this report, counselors focus on the development of positive self-concepts in children. There have been numerous studies that show low self-esteem as a critical factor in the development of deviant or potentially destructive behaviors (Leung and Drasgow, 1986; Yanish and Battle, 1985; Lorr and Wunderlich, 1986; Eskilson et al., 1986; and Kaplan, 1975, 1976).

The number of studies addressing the promotion of mental health through primary prevention has recently increased (Givson, 1989). Many of these studies reported positive changes in attitudes and behaviors as the result of classroom guidance activities and small group counseling sessions (Cobb and Richards, 1983; Myrick and Dixon, 1985; Myrick, Merhill, and Swanson, 1986; Bleck and Bleck, 1982; Chandler et al., 1984).

The impact of elementary school counselors on children's ability to cope with the myriad of complex social problems they are faced with may best be examined by reviewing these issues separately.

Academic Achievement/Underachievement

The following list briefly reviews the results of several studies regarding methods of improving academic achievement:

(1) Early intervention with low-achieving elementary school students made a positive difference in their achievement (Jackson, Cleveland, and Meranda, 1975; Esters and Levant, 1983).

(2) Elementary school counselors have a positive effect on academic achievement (Gerler, Kinney, and Anderson, 1985; Downing, 1977; Peck and Jackson, 1976).

(3) Encouraging teachers to set appropriate standards of performance for each individual promotes student achievement (Burkman and Brezin, 1981).

(4) Three years after Florida hired elementary school counselors, students who were underachievers in reading advanced 1.1 years in seven months (Barrientos and Glossbrenner, 1989).

(5) In a study of 117 underachieving fourth graders, no immediate, significant differences were noted between experimental and control group students after the experimental group was provided with 2.5 years of counseling. But a follow-up study of the participants as high school seniors (Jackson, Cleveland, and Meranda, 1975) showed significant differences in class rank in favor of the counseled students.

(6) Groups that received elementary guidance and counseling differed significantly from those that did not, not only in academic achievement but also in making responsible choices of courses of study (Adams, 1974; Doyle, 1976).

(7) Children who participated in counseling groups for children of divorced parents showed better school performance (Freeman and Couchman, 1985; Freeman, 1984).

The Appalachia Educational Laboratory (1984) found, in three school districts in Virginia, that more than 60 percent of staff felt that elementary guidance had contributed to improved test scores and more than 90 percent of parents thought that elementary counseling helped the children.

Dropout Rates

The following list describes the results of several studies regarding methods of dropout reduction and increasing attendance:

(1) The U.S. Office of Education discovered 47 percent fewer dropouts and 50 percent fewer failures in schools that have adequate counselor/student ratios (American School Counselor Association, 1979, 1981).

(2) School programs that assist children in developing positive self-concepts and/or in improving their self-esteem should pave the way to reduced dropout rates. Poor academic performance and early negative experiences in school tend to reinforce children's negative self-concepts, poor attitudes toward school, and a belief that school is not for them. This process is cumulative, and counseling and guidance intervention must occur early in the process to prevent dropping out from being the end result (Ruben, 1989).

(3) Self-esteem and other psychological variables have been shown to correlate with dropout statistics. (Wehlage and Rutter, 1986).

(4) A number of authors have determined that the characteristics of potential dropouts can be recognized as early as the third grade (Lloyd, 1978; Walters and Kranzler, 1970; Wehlage, 1988).

(5) Weekly group guidance sessions provided to 60 elementary students identified to be at high risk of dropping out resulted in significant improvement in attendance, school attitude, and self-esteem (Barrientos and Glossbrenner, 1989).

(6) A longitudinal study (Gerler, 1980) showed that classroom guidance programs have a positive effect on school attendance.

(7) Numerous studies have supported the premise that elementary school counselors can have a positive impact on children's classroom behaviors and attitudes toward school, which may prevent them from dropping out (Gerler and Anderson, 1986; Cobb and Richards, 1983; Downing, 1977; Wirth, 1977; Deffenbacher and Kemper, 1974).

Behaviors, Attitudes, and Skills

The following study results demonstrate the effects of guidance and counseling on students' behaviors, attitudes, and skills:

(1) Classroom guidance activities significantly influenced improvement in ratings of children's behavior, conduct grades, and school attitude scores (Gerler and Anderson, 1986; Cobb and Richards, 1983; Myrick and Dixon, 1985; Myrick, Merhill, and Swanson, 1986; Bleck and Bleck, 1982; Chandler, et al., 1984).

(2) Evaluations of the elementary student counseling centers in the San Diego School District showed a reduction of 80-90 percent in suspensions and referrals to the principal (Miller, 1989).

(3) Students participating in an elementary school counseling group for young procrastinators (grades three through six) significantly improved their homework completion scores when compared with those of fellow procrastinators waiting to be in the group (Morse, 1987).

(4) A peer facilitation program in which elementary counselors trained fifth graders to work with second and third graders with behavior problems had a positive impact on the younger students' problem behaviors and attitudes toward themselves and others (Bowman and Myrick, 1987).

(5) Students (fourth through sixth graders) who had been referred to small group counseling by their teachers for exhibiting hostile and aggressive behaviors scored significantly lower on measures of aggression and hostility than a control group at the conclusion of the intervention (Omizo, Hershberger, and Omizo, 1988).

(6) Students exposed to a developmental guidance unit on coping skills for being home alone exhibited increased knowledge about procedures to use when alone. In addition, parents expressed increased confidence in their children's ability to care for themselves (Bundy and Boser, 1987).

(7) Parents who participated in effective parenting groups led by school counselors became more trusting of their children (Jackson and Brown, 1986).

IV

State Legislatures and Elementary School Counseling Policy

State Legislators and Education Policy

State legislators are key players in the formation of education policy. Three ways they can affect policy are by allocating funds, creating mandates, and influencing public opinion.

The primary role of legislators in developing education policy is the allocation of state dollars. Every educational program costs money, and policymakers have the power to increase or decrease state education expenditures. In addition to determining the total dollars that a state will provide for education, legislators develop state funding formulas that determine how much money goes to each district and can also specify general program areas for which that money should be spent. Lastly, dollars can be reallocated as educational priorities change. Local boards of education make specific spending decisions while state boards and state departments of education set standards and oversee the implementation of policies.

The extent to which the legislature influences the decisions of these agencies depends upon the educational governance structure in the individual state. Mandates can be set forth in legislation or in resolutions that require or recommend certain programs to be implemented. Legislators can also support various education improvement strategies by taking advantage of their high visibility on state and local levels. Strategies such as making speeches, attending conferences and local meetings, and using the media can bring an issue to the forefront of public attention.

Whether approaching policy through any or all of these methods, it is important for policymakers to have clearly defined goals for legislation to be effective. For instance, a mandate not accompanied by funding can be ineffective, burdening schools rather than improving them. Groups lobbying for legislative support should also reach a consensus about what needs to be accomplished and work for policies they feel will lead to desired results. In addition, advocates need to be prepared to answer questions regarding current policies, such as accreditation standards, when giving testimony before the legislature.

When everyone involved in policy development knows what is needed, effective policy can result. An example relating to school counseling demonstrates this. Many states do not have an abundance of adequately trained elementary school counselors available to hire, and universities are not all equipped with programs to prepare counselors for work in this field. Legislation mandating a trained counselor in every school could be in vain if this issue is not taken into account; but with proper planning and an appropriate start-up period, states can ensure that counselor education/certification programs are implemented and that trained counselors are available to fill newly created positions.

> *"I certainly look forward to the time when elementary guidance will be fully supported financially by the state.... We need a fully supported guidance program to assist us in preparing our students for the future."* W. W. Herenton, Super - intendent, Memphis City Schools (Cryer & Deanes, 1985).

Legislative Interest in Elementary Counseling

Legislators are being pulled in hundreds of directions in the area of education alone, many of which appear to be immediate avenues for solving some of the current problems being addressed. Yet, it seems clear that short-term quick fixes aren't bringing lasting improvements to our education systems. Elementary school counseling, when approached correctly, is a preventive measure that appears to result in long-term, positive outcomes.

Recently, education reform and the restructuring of schools have been on the lips of every policymaker who has education-related responsibilities. These discussions revolve around issues such as at-risk youth, agency collaboration, parental involvement, and generally, the low level of academic achievement attained by many students. Legislators are being asked to help deal with these issues. Comprehensive elementary school counseling programs are a way to address many of these educational roadblocks.

There are many concerns today regarding education, all of which are relevant to legislators. State dropout rates in 1986 totalled 28.5 percent nationally (*USA Today*, 1989), and many students graduating from high school have not attained the minimum level of knowledge expected of a 12th grader in some academic areas. Hence, these youth are entering adulthood unprepared to go on to higher education or enter the job market; to participate as citizens; and to raise their own children academically, socially, or financially.

All of this can lead to "unemployment, a need for public assistance, treatment or institutionalization for mental health reasons, involvement with the judicial system, and possibly imprisonment for civil or criminal convictions" (Washington's Fair Start Bill, 1989). These dependencies cost the state, and therefore the taxpayers, a lot of money. Preventive approaches such as elementary counseling can lessen those costs in the long term. In fact, research has shown that "every dollar spent on early prevention and intervention can save $4.74 in costs of remedial education, welfare and crime" (MDC, Inc., 1988, p. 40). We are spending five times more than we need to in trying to correct problems that could be avoided.

State Elementary Counseling Policies

As pressure on state policymakers to improve education increases, state budgets are quickly spent on education reform initiatives. School counseling, particularly elementary school counseling, becomes one item on a long list of fixes--all of which are important to better educational achievement and all of which are being lobbied for at the state level. While legislators and their staff can spend time researching various educational improvement methods, their time is limited. Attention will be given to those approaches that stand out because they have received attention in other states, are known to work quickly (though their results may be short term), or have been presented through a strong lobbying effort.

One way the Florida Elementary Guidance Task Force caught the attention of legislators was by including dollars and cents in its presentation supporting elementary school counselors. Its 1971 position paper quoted that year's costs for certain interventions in areas where counselors can be used for prevention:

> Every year in the United States over 100,000 children ages 7-17 are held in jails or places of detention. In Florida the Division of Youth Services reports that the state pays an average of $23.78 per resident per day in training school and $13.98 in halfway houses for a total of over eight million dollars a year.... The

elementary school counselor can help prevent delinquency through programs of early identification, appropriate referrals, and through the implementation of programs for behavioral change.

More than half of all school dropouts have average or above average intelligence but are underachievers. Last year 48,789 Florida pupils including 9,550 first graders failed to earn promotion. It cost the state approximately $35.5 million to have them repeat that grade.... The elementary school counselor can develop and organize guidance services which help correct problems that interfere with learning.

These numbers paint a convincing picture of why state policymakers need to be aware of elementary school counseling and how counselors not only can help children but also can be an asset to the educational system as a whole from academic, personal, social, *and* budgetary standpoints.

"I do not see how [the governor] and the legislators could even conceive of a superior school program that did not include elementary counselors." Teacher, Maryville, Tennessee (Parker, 1985).

Counseling in elementary schools has long-term, far-reaching potential. School counselors are professionals trained to work with teachers not only for improved achievement in a student's personal/social life but also for improved academic achievement.

A number of legislatures have mandated counseling or encouraged their state education departments to implement a mandate. As seen in the 50-state chart in Appendix A, all states have some counselors in elementary schools, yet only 12 have mandates for counseling. More important, only eight support counseling programs with state funding. As previously mentioned, mandates are not necessarily helpful and in fact can be burdensome without financial assistance. In states without mandates, the number of counselors in elementary schools varies with local support. Counselors are plentiful in states such as Florida and the District of Columbia, but other states such as Minnesota and Utah have few. In these latter instances, services may be concentrated in districts that may or may not have the greatest need for counselors. *In truth, all students can benefit from the prevention and intervention provided by elementary school counselors, and policies at the state level help equalize these services across districts.*

To understand how policy is developed regarding elementary school counseling, a number of state efforts serve as good examples. The following sections look at states with counseling mandates (Arkansas and Virginia), with no mandate but with strong state financial support (Florida), and where efforts are being made to solicit support for elementary counseling (Texas and Washington).

Arkansas

In 1983, the Arkansas General Assembly helped create a mandate for elementary counselors when it passed Act 445, the Quality Education Act. This legislation directed the State Board of Education to develop new minimum accreditation standards for public schools. The 15-member Education Standards Committee made recommendations regarding which standards would be adopted. The Joint Interim Committee of the Legislature then reviewed these recommendations and forwarded them to the state board. As a result, the accreditation standards of 1984 included a section on guidance and counseling, which reads as follows:

(1) Each school shall provide a guidance program to aid students in educational, personal and vocational development.

(2) Each school shall provide the necessary facilities, supportive personnel and privacy for counseling.

(3) Each school district shall provide access in the elementary and secondary schools to a certified school counselor.... The ratio for the elementary level shall be not less than one (1) counselor for every six hundred (600) students by June 1, 1987, and one (1) counselor for every four hundred and fifty (450) students beginning with the 1989-90 school year.

It is interesting to note that Arkansas' mandatory ratio is 1:450; the ideal recommended ratio for districts in the accreditation standards is 1:300.

Virginia

One model elementary school counseling program involving state legislators comes from Virginia. Appendix B illustrates the evolution of the Virginia elementary school counseling mandate, showing how a long-term effort combining the forces of a strong counseling community and support on the state level can result in a comprehensive, successful, statewide program.

The process took 12 years, from 1975-1987, and, while the legislature made its first resolution in support of elementary counseling in 1977, strong legislative support began in 1981 when the Joint Legislative Subcommittee was formed to study the issue. Finally, in 1987, after numerous resolutions and various incremental legislative successes, the Virginia Board of Education amended its accreditation standards to include a 1:500 counselor/student ratio and a recommendation that 60 percent of a counselor's time be devoted to counseling students. This last measure is significant because it recognizes that, previously, a counselor's time was often filled with administrative and other noncounseling responsibilities, taking time away from needed student contact hours.

Florida

The two previous examples refer to efforts that resulted in mandates for elementary counselors in the schools. Florida worked with its state legislature not for a mandate, but for funding for elementary counselors and for a law helping define their role.

In 1971, concerned professionals formed the Elementary Guidance Task Force in Florida to try to gain state funding to support counselors. The task force included a school board member, a state PTA leader, a counselor/educator, a member of the Florida Elementary School Principals' Association, and others. Associated with the task force were legislative consultants (three state legislators and three staff) and resource personnel from the Department of Education.

The task force developed a position paper and sample legislation. The position paper emphasized the various areas of a student's life in which counselors can intervene. It mentioned social problems and school problems including drug abuse, vocational and career development, integration, family transitions, juvenile delinquency, emotional disturbance, school discipline cases, dropouts, and nonpromotion of students. Also discussed were the

needs of parents, teachers, and principals regarding the problems of school and society and the effect of these problems on young students.

During the 1972 session, Senate Bill 239 and companion House Bill 2978 were presented for passage into law. The final bill that was signed into law provided funds for the hiring of certified elementary counselors. Each district would receive funding for one counselor. The additional dollars would be dispersed according to average daily attendance figures for each district.

In 1972, the state allocated $2.5 million, which funded 233 counselors. Today, Florida funds 1,250 counselors in its elementary schools.

One strength of Florida's initiative was the support received from all branches of the education and mental health communities. The proposed legislation received backing from many organizations including the Florida Association of Mental Health, Florida Association of School Superintendents, Florida Congress of Parents and Teachers, Florida division of the National Council for School Social Work, Executive Board of the American Association of University Women, Executive Board of the Florida Association of School Psychologists, and a number of local school boards. As this list demonstrates, the scope of support for elementary counseling is wide and should be exploited fully by those wanting to increase a state's commitment to this profession.

Florida has also passed legislation supporting the appropriate use of a professional school counselor's time. Counselors in every state can relate to the problem of having to spend too much time on clerical and administrative work, leaving little time for counseling activities. Section 230.2313 (3) of the Florida Statutes, known as the *"75-25 Legislation"* addresses this concern. It reads:

> School counselors shall spend at least 75 percent of work time providing direct counseling related to students, and shall devote not more than 25 percent of work time to administrative activities, provided that such activities are related to the provision of guidance services.

This policy allows schools to make maximum use of a counselor's expertise.

Local districts were given the responsibility to implement the legislation. To assist them with this charge, the Florida Association for Counseling and Development created a model for school counseling in Florida that included specific definitions of activities defined as "direct counseling related," "guidance related administrative," and "non-guidance."

Texas

Texas is one state working to develop elementary school counseling policy. Recently, the Education Study Committee on Dropout Prevention in Texas included a section on elementary school counselors in its "Interim Report to the 71st Legislature Joint Special Interim Committee on High School Dropouts." The report cites the current use of elementary counselors in some Texas schools where "elementary counselors play a vital role in involving parents with both school activities and student problems." Counselors in one Dallas district "teach parenting skills that promote student achievement."

The report recommended that elementary counselors be provided to school districts as follows:

> Every elementary school campus in districts with larger than 3,000 ADA [average daily attendance], or in areas which are characterized by greater than 30% low socioeconomic status populations, shall employ a full-time guidance counselor. That counselor's primary role shall be identification of at-risk students in the school and development of guidance programs to meet the needs of teachers, parents and students to improve student self-esteem, attendance, behavior, and academic achievement at the elementary level. Districts with 3,000 ADA or less shall employ part-time guidance counselors for each elementary school campus and/or may contract with area regional educational service centers for guidance counselor services to meet the needs of at-risk students identified at the campus level.

Although this report focuses on identifying at-risk students and developing programs for them, counselors who work in schools part time are limited in the amount of preventive activities they can provide, finding much of their time taken up with crisis intervention.

This section of the recommendations was not adopted by the committee.

Washington

The Washington School Counselor Association has been working for legislative support of elementary school counseling for 20 years. Current actions are being organized by the HARK (Helping At-Risk Kids) Coalition. It is made up of members of several organizations concerned with child welfare such as the Washington Association for Counseling and Development, the Washington School Counselor Association, the Washington Education Association, the Washington state PTA, the Elementary School Principals Association of Washington, the Washington Association of School Psychologists, the Washington Association of School Social Workers, and the School Nurse Organization of Washington. It is important to note that this group consists not only of counseling professionals but also professionals from all points of the educational spectrum.

Efforts by the HARK Coalition are strong on the state level. Legislative lobbying and public education are being used to "generate support for legislative proposals aimed at benefiting children." HARK's best legislative effort to date has been Senator Cliff Bailey's Fair Start Bill (1989 SB 5249).

The $88 million bill had some important ingredients. First, a list of barriers to learning, similar to those discussed earlier in this report, were emphasized to show that these problems are not isolated within any age group. Children in first and second grades are strongly influenced by environmental factors as much as, if not more than, high school students. Next, the long-term effects of poor learning were noted, effects that are not only devastating in a personal sense but also *expensive for state government.* Unemployment, public assistance, institutionalization, and involvement in the criminal justice system all dig deep into state budgets.

The bill suggested how these barriers to learning and productive adulthood can be intercepted:

> The legislature finds that the provision of counseling and related prevention and intervention services at the elementary school level will enhance the classroom environment for students and teachers and better enable students to realize their academic and personal potentials.

> The legislature finds that it is essential that resources be made available to school districts to provide early prevention and intervention services to students, their families, and classroom teachers; to enhance the opportunity for students to realize academic and personal success; and to reduce the number of students at risk of performing below their ability levels in school.

Had this legislation passed, the resulting Fair Start Program would have provided grants to applying districts to assist them with prevention and intervention programs in elementary schools. Districts would have been allowed to hire a team of professionals to work in the school according to the students' needs. In addition to counseling, comprehensive services would have been promoted through the support of cooperation between groups such as the Departments of Public Instruction, Health, and Social Services. Such cooperation helps prevent duplication of services and provides continuity of services for children and their families.

The Fair Start Bill is again being debated in the Washington Legislature during the 1990 session.

Federal Efforts

Mention must also be made of efforts to gain support from Congress for elementary school counseling. Legislation supported by the American Association for Counseling and Development was introduced to the 101st Congress on February 7, 1990. Called the Elementary School Counseling Demonstration Act, this bill (HR 3970) calls for $5 million to be appropriated during the next five fiscal years with the purpose of supporting elementary counseling services "by providing grants to local educational agencies to establish effective and innovative elementary school counseling programs that can serve as national models."

Counseling advocates at the state and local levels will be tracking the progress of this legislation. Its passage would provide a way for some districts to gain preliminary financial support for elementary school counseling programs.

Some Policy Alternatives

The logic for supporting elementary counseling at the state level is solid, but the dollars are not always available to sustain the theory. Many states just can't squeeze millions from their budgets or additional taxes from their citizens. If the money is not available for full financial backing, how else can states assure that children receive the benefits of school counseling programs?

Research shows that effectiveness of counseling increases greatly when the counselor/student ratio is near 1:300 and when a counselor is assigned to one school only. According to Tennessee's "Study of Elementary Guidance and Counseling" (1985), "Counselors with fewer students who are in a single school full time...provided assistance to larger percentages of staff members and students than...counselors with more students who may service more than one school." The low ratio makes counselors accessible to educators, students, and parents, allowing them to build strong relationships. The stronger these relationships, the greater the ability of the counselor to work effectively. "The effect of counselor-student ratio and number of schools served cannot be overemphasized," the Tennessee report states.

Matching Grants

The matching grant approach is one way to get a program started. A state commits a specified dollar amount to a grant fund and schools or districts apply for funding. The grantee then commits its own resources to match the state funds on a 50:50 basis (or other agreed-upon ratio). One positive outcome of this approach is that once a program is set in place, parents and other community members can see firsthand how worthwhile elementary school counseling is and can work to find the dollars to continue the program.

In the case of elementary school counseling, support has often grown once counselors are placed in some schools. Tennessee's 1985 study serves as one example. Here, parents from schools with counselors wholeheartedly supported them; and in schools without counselors, 90 percent of administrators said they wanted them hired. This level of support has also been received from teachers and principals.

> *In an end-of-the-year survey, 85 percent of the teachers in Los Angeles who were served by elementary school counselors were enthusiastic about the counseling programs and wanted them continued. The remaining 15 percent of teachers wanted counselors to spend more time in their schools. (Parker, 1985).*

The drawback of a matching grant program is that some programs do start and end with the grant--an outcome that can be quite disappointing to all involved, especially the children. It is important, therefore, for advocates to work toward maintenance of elementary school counseling in a state if it is initiated through this method.

Business-Education Partnerships

Another funding approach is the business-education partnership. Recently, businesses have shown a well-placed interest in improving education in America's schools. The future of any business lies in a qualified workforce. In response to this need, businesses have become involved in education initiatives on many levels. A state or district could certainly court major businesses to "adopt" an elementary school counseling program through contributions of dollars or supplies. In return, businesses would receive publicity for supporting youth and contributing to education, in addition to the intangible, personal rewards of knowing they have helped the children of their community.

Two examples of partnerships in support of elementary school counseling programs exist in California and Iowa. The programs are based in San Diego and Des Moines and involve participation of the Kiwanis club and McDonald's restaurants, respectively.

It has been almost 10 years since the Kiwanis club of San Diego became involved with elementary school counseling. The Kiwanians have donated more than $60,000 and 10,000 hours to the program, which sets up counseling centers in elementary schools to help children learn more about self-awareness, decision making, and problem solving. There are counseling centers in 95 of the San Diego Unified School District's 107 elementary schools. Every student uses a center about five or six times a year.

This program has received attention both on the national and local levels. According to one article, "It continues to receive accolades from such notables as former US Secretary of Education William J. Bennett and US Senator Pete Wilson, along with major awards from the San Diego County Juvenile Delinquency Prevention Commission and the Kiwanis California-Nevada-Hawaii District" (*Kiwanis Magazine*, 1989).

Kiwanis leader Edwin Swain Miller is one of the program's strongest advocates:

> I am convinced that working with persons *after* their lives have gone wrong is working at the wrong end of the problem. The solutions for personal problems involving youth are found to be more effective if applied in early grades through programs of prevention (*Kiwanis Magazine*, 1989).

In Iowa, a pilot school counseling program in 10 Des Moines elementary schools called Smoother Sailing is receiving praise from teachers, administrators, parents, students, and leaders in the Des Moines community. Supported by local McDonald's restaurants the first year and other area businesses in its second year, this program helps elementary school children develop coping skills for life. The unique ratio of one counselor to 250 students allows the elementary school counselor to provide a comprehensive program that addresses student needs more adequately. Business contributions ($400,000) funded the hiring of the counselors in the 10 pilot schools during the 1988-89 school year and provided 80 percent of the funding for 1989-90. The funding for 1989-90 will be matched in 1990-91, the third year of the pilot project.

The program has been so successful that school district officials and Des Moines business leaders are exploring ways to finance the 1:250 counselor/student ratio in all 41 of the Des Moines elementary schools at the end of the three pilot years.

Retired Juvenile Court Judge Don L. Tidrick supports Smoother Sailing. "Twenty years of juvenile court experience has...persuaded me that the tremendous personal problems of children...beset them at a time when they have not yet developed any skills with which to counter. [This] program is positioned at the right place at the right time in a child's life" (Smoother Sailing brochure, 1989).

Others Sources of Support

Graduate students who have taken their beginning counseling classes and retired professionals who are available on a volunteer basis can serve as resources for school districts implementing elementary school counseling programs. It should be emphasized that interns and volunteers cannot be used in place of qualified counselors but can work under the direct supervision of the school counselor, allowing the counselor more time for direct contact with children.

V

Conclusion

A troubled child makes a poor learner. As Mary Hatwood Futrell, former president of the National Education Association, once stated, "Just as a child who is hungry cannot learn, so too a child who is wracked with anxiety or mired in depression or burdened with self-hatred cannot learn" (*Washington Post*, 1985). Students need specific information and often counseling about the problems they carry with them to school. These problems are caused by stressors such as divorce, neglect, abuse, and poverty, in addition to pressures to achieve academically. Early exposure to services such as comprehensive elementary school counseling programs can build an emotionally healthy foundation for children and result in improved academic achievement, reduced dropout rates, effective decision-making and problem-solving skills, and better self-concepts.

We must *all* take responsibility for our children, for their future is our future. Teachers and classrooms are the focal point of a child's school life. Teachers help children learn and elementary school teachers strongly influence children's attitudes toward both school and themselves. Yet teachers, with their focus on academic development, have neither the time nor training to meet adequately the social, personal, and career development needs of all students. Parents try to provide their children with support in all areas of their lives. But often, with the ever-increasing financial pressures and ever-changing family structures existing today, they do not always have the time or energy to help children develop strong and healthy social, emotional, and academic skills.

In developing policies and programs to address the problems our young people face, we must make the best use of all our resources. Professionally trained elementary school counselors are one of those resources. These counselors act as a bridge between the emotional, social, and intellectual domains of students' lives and are charged with viewing children as whole people.

Recommendations

Following are recommendations for developing state policy regarding carefully planned elementary school counseling programs:

- Legislators interested in expanding school counseling programs should encourage the formation of a legislative study committee to determine the best ways to support elementary guidance and counseling statewide.
- Counseling professionals and educators who support such programs must become organized and active on the state level.
- Pilot projects are needed to serve as models for states and *must* include a thorough evaluation plan.
- Three- to five-year start-up periods are a sensible time frame to use when considering implementing a state mandate for elementary counseling. This provides time for universities to prepare qualified elementary school counselors to fill new staffing needs; for policymakers on the state and local levels to develop needed

financial support; and for counselors, educators, and parents to develop strong, effective comprehensive counseling programs.

- Guidance committees comprised of teachers, parents, administrators, and businesspeople should be developed to act as liaisons between the school and community. Committees also can assist counselors in understanding the needs of the schools and the community and in developing guidance curriculum and counseling services.

- Realistic counselor/student ratios must be supported for counselors to be effective in helping students achieve academic, personal, and social success. A ratio of 1:300 is recommended.

- Counselors need to be free to perform counseling and counseling-related duties rather than burdened by administrative or clerical tasks. A counseling/noncounseling time ratio of 75 percent/25 percent (as seen in Florida's model) is recommended.

- Because of the variety of tasks they perform, including work with teachers, administrators, parents, and community agency representatives, counselors need a flexible work schedule. Not all of a counselor's responsibilities are best performed during school hours.

- Professional development must be encouraged and financially supported for all education personnel.

Don Brubaker, director of elementary education for the Des Moines Public Schools, is an advocate of elementary school counseling programs.

> Children come to school today under entirely different conditions and face more problems than time or space permit me to share. Simply stated, the counseling program...is not merely a benefit to children--it is an absolute necessity. We must find a way to fund this much needed program. Our children need our help now. They have a right to those skills that will enable them to be successful and to cope with this complex society. They have only one opportunity to grow up. We have the responsibility to see they have help to do it right (Des Moines Public Schools, 1988).

Joined together, teachers, legislators, and counselors create a powerful force in the fight to improve the lives of our young people. With improved communication and collaboration between all youth-serving professionals, we may see the day when all children achieve their maximum potential.

Appendix A

50-State Survey

State Policy for Elementary School Counselors

			If Yes:						If No:			
	Elem. Couns. Mandate		Source of Mandate			Ratio	Funding Source:		Is Mandate Considered?		Any Elem. Couns.?	
State	Yes	No	Legis.	State Dept.	State Board	Ratio	State	Local	Yes	No	Yes	No
AL	X			X		1:400	X	X			X	
AK		X								X	X	
AZ		X								X	X	
AR	X		X			1:450		X			X	
CA		X								X	X	
CO		X								X	X	
CT		X								X	X	
DE		X							X		X	
DC		X						X		X	X	
FL		X					X				X	
GA		X							X		X	
HI	X		X	X		None	X				X	
ID		X								X	X	
IL		X								X	X	
IN		X								X	X	
IA	X		X	X	X	None	X				X	
KS		X								X	X	
KY		X							X		X	
LA		X								X	X	
ME	X		X			None		X			X	
MD		X								X	X	
MA		X							X		X	
MI		X								X	X	
MN		X								X	X	
MS		X							X		X	
MO		X						X		X	X	
MT	X				X	1:400	X	X			X	
NE		X								X	X	
NV		X							X		X	
NH	X				X	1:500		X			X	
NJ		X								X	X	
NM		X								X	X	
NY		X								X	X	
NC	X		X	X	X	1:400	X	X			X	
ND		X								X	X	

	If Yes:								If No:			
	Elem. Couns. Mandate		Source of Mandate			Ratio	Funding Source:		Is Mandate Considered?		Any Elem. Couns.?	
State	Yes	No	Legis.	State Dept.	State Board	Ratio	State	Local	Yes	No	Yes	No
OH		X								X	X	
OK		X								X	X	
OR		X							X		X	
PA		X								X	X	
RI		X							X		X	
SC	X		X	X	X	Flex.	X				X	
SD		X								X	X	
TN		X							X		X	
TX		X							X		X	
UT		X								X	X	
VT	X			X		1:400		X			X	
VA	X		X		X	1:500	X				X	
WA		X							X		X	
WV	X		X			1:500		X			X	
WI		X							X		X	
WY		X								X	X	

Source: National Conference of State Legislatures, December 1989.

Appendix B

Virginia Elementary Counseling Mandate

Summary of Actions

1975 Virginia Elementary School Counseling Association forms a state legislative committee to work toward mandate.

1976 Statewide public relations campaign commences; Virginia PTA adopts resolutions urging state support of elementary counseling; some support obtained from General Assembly.

1977 Senate Joint Resolution #132 passes General Assembly, encouraging support for elementary guidance and counseling and requesting Board of Education to provide programs (little resulted).

1978 Virginia Commission on Guidance in Elementary Schools formed, intensifying legislative and public relations activities.

1980 Senate Bill 329, to provide state matching funds for elementary counseling, fails.

1981 Senate Joint Resolution 132 passes, establishing a joint legislative subcommittee to study developmental guidance and counseling for all elementary public school children. Report issued recommending program.

1982 Senate Joint Resolution 66 passes, expressing commitment to elementary guidance and counseling programs; SJR 70 passes, requesting Board of Education to reallocate resources between elementary and secondary levels (no result); SJR 69 passes, authorizing joint subcommittee to continue study.

1983 Senate Joint Resolution 57 passes, reaffirming interest in programs for elementary counseling and requesting secretary of education and Board of Education to implement programs; report of the joint subcommittee presented to governor; General Assembly recommends implementation of programs.

1984 Senate Joint Resolution 32 passes, extending joint subcommittee study; Senate Bill 423 passes, providing grants "with such funds as are appropriated" for model developmental guidance program (no funds appropriated); SJR 32 passes, requiring State Board of Education to report annually to Senate and House Education committees concerning status and needs of elementary guidance programs; second report of joint subcommittee contains recommendations to require developmental elementary guidance programs and provide financial resources.

1985 Virginia Counselors Association endorses governor in 1985 campaign when he advocated elementary guidance programs.

1986 Board of Education passes resolution to phase in elementary guidance and counseling in all of Virginia's public elementary schools over a four-year period and includes this in accreditation standards.

1987 The Virginia Board of Education amended its accreditation standards to include a 1:500 counselor/student ratio and recommendation that 60 percent of counselors' time be devoted to counseling students.

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